

Places of possibility: where mixed-race partners meet

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Abstract: Although mixed-race partnering in the United States is on the rise, scholars have paid scant attention to *where* people of ‘differently racialized parentage’ (Ifekwunigwe, 2001: 46) actually meet. In an effort to help fill this gap, this paper (1) offers an overview of current scholarship on places of encounter and (2) aims to provide a blueprint for future research that will explicitly interrogate where mixed-race partners meet. We organize our survey around four contexts – residential neighborhoods, workplaces, educational settings, and cyberspace – to point out productive avenues for further inquiry. In contrast to much of the literature cited in this essay and in an effort to emphasize the intersections of race and space, we advocate for new scholarship that addresses the times and places where routine, prosaic, interactions between adults can erode long-standing stereotypes and lead to meaningful relationships. In studying everyday social and spatial processes, we highlight the potential insights gained from detailing the ‘micro-geographies of habitual practice’ (Nash, 2000: 656).

Key words: context, everyday, mixed-race meeting, racial mixing.

She’s only a friend, a friend who happens to be a cream-colored blonde of 5’10” with long legs and eyes of the richest brown. People notice when she enters a room, particularly when it’s with me.

Old school hip-hop comes through the speakers as she and I take a seat at the bar, but I get the strangest feeling when we raise our first nips. It’s as if all eyes in this mostly white crowd have turned in our direction. . . . I, the black man, their lesser equal, have no right to even breathe near what is theirs. Because I’m one of the only dark faces there, they cannot see my intelligence, nor my sarcasm, nor the fact that she and I are dear friends. If it were up to them, I would be punished by whatever means available.

Maybe I’m just having a bad night. Maybe I’ve been mistaken for someone else, some old rival that’s just popped up, sitting next to the woman of their dreams. But most likely nothing’s wrong with the picture on my screen. Most likely I’m a black man still behind enemy lines, a caramel scapegoat trapped in a nation that still can’t confront its deepest sins. (Kenji Jasper, December 2004 commentary on National Public Radio)

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I Introduction

A bar; a 'cream-colored blonde' woman and a 'caramel'-colored man; 'dear friends'; black looks (cf. hooks, 1992). Kenji Jasper's account of the smoldering race/sex nexus in US society captures deep-seated prejudices against racial mixing and demonstrates how 'racialization . . . [is] an essential aspect of how everyday geographies are made, understood, and challenged' (Hoelscher, 2003: 659). Indeed, the fears framing mixed-race relations, and the particular upending of normative power structures that occurs when blacks and whites socialize together, shape the affective and material landscape described by Jasper. The bigotry surrounding mixed-race interactions derives from a racial hierarchy wherein the inclusion of some produces the exclusion of others; 'the dominant group defines itself by the privileges it denies to another group' (Deskins and Bettinger, 2002: 57). Jasper cogently expresses how race continues to matter; we hasten to add that it matters in varied and contextualized ways. Could Jasper's experience have been different on another night of the week? At a different time of day? In another place? With a different woman? Or if it involved a different couple altogether?

We start our essay with a description of a mixed-race couple in a particular setting because this paper revolves around opening up conversations about what places are possible for mixed-race encounters. While Jasper's story reveals potent hostilities, we want to deepen investigations into places where people can meet and form relationships with racial others. Accordingly, our main objectives in this paper are (1) to offer an overview of current scholarship on places of encounter¹ and (2) to provide a blueprint for future research that will explicitly interrogate where mixed-race partners meet. Throughout the review we draw on several theoretical approaches to sketch a research agenda that addresses where mixed-race partners meet within the everyday, 'the landscape closest to us, the world most

immediately met' (Highmore, 2002: 1). We foreground the everyday because it attends to both micro- and macrological processes and grapples with the heterogeneity of lived experiences.

Ash Amin describes everyday interactions as part of a 'politics of propinquity' (2004: 38), which he defines as 'a politics of negotiating the immanent effects of geographical juxtaposition between physical spaces, overlapping communities, contrasting cultural practices' (2004: 39). We translate Amin's reconceptualization of regions and propinquity to think about the relational 'heterotopic sense of place' (Amin, 2004: 37) that also characterizes everyday contexts of meeting. Specifically, in this paper we discuss the possibilities of mixed-race encounters in four contexts: residential neighborhoods, workplaces, educational settings, and cyberspace. We choose to focus on these four places because they are familiar parts of many everyday geographies (cf. Secor, 2004). We are not suggesting, however, that these are the only sites where people meet.² Yet, in an effort to diagram our agenda, we narrow our review to these four sites and ponder 'the possibilities of different ways of doing, or being . . . in context' (Jarvis *et al.*, 2001: 28; cf. Amin, 2004). These 'different ways' point to how and where racialization might adopt new and diverse forms, such as in the subversion of dominant racial paradigms. In foregrounding these themes we hope to advance deepened interpretations of space. Moreover, in the social sciences, a research focus on mixed-race encounters can turn inside out a major preoccupation with separation and segregation. Shifting from thinking about spaces of impossibility to spaces of possibility is more than just a discursive trick; it delineates a research agenda that stresses the mutual constitution of race and place. We thus trend a fine line in this paper as we simultaneously acknowledge the power of entrenched racism while also considering the places where racially different people may meet.

We focus on long-term mixed-race partnership formation and deliberately skip dating,

flirting, and other shorter-term interactions because people who mixed-race date are not necessarily the same as those who mixed-race marry (Yancey, 2002). Long-term heterosexual mixed-race partnerships also pose more of a challenge to racial hierarchies than dating couples because many of these partnerships (literally) give birth to multiracial children. These progeny, in their own way, further expose the fictions of fixed racial categories and stereotypes.

Our dedication to exposing everyday geographies of meeting departs from general trends in the literature. For instance, scholarship on mixed-race partnership formation usually claims that the degree of racial segregation in a place is inversely related to the rate of racial mixing. We do not doubt that residential segregation matters, but we believe that to understand partnership formation we must go beyond relying upon a tired correlation between certain social processes and spatial patterns. The commentaries on current declines in social capital and the diminishing connections among neighbors and friends (e.g., Putnam, 2000) make the simple causal linkage of mixed-race partnering and residential segregation seem even more insufficient. We therefore assert that such lines of inquiry fail to think through where, and under what circumstances, bodies do come together and do negotiate the 'politics of propinquity' (Amin, 2004: 38). This shift in analytical attention is imperative because, for instance, between 1980 and 2000 black-white segregation declined only slightly while the segregation of Latinos and Asians from whites grew (Logan *et al.*, 2004); at the same time, rates of mixed-race partnering increased nationally from 2% in 1980 to 5.2% in 2000 (US Bureau of the Census, 1998; 2003).³ In some cities, such as Seattle, Washington, racially mixed couples now comprise nearly 10% of all married couples (US Bureau of the Census, 2000). This kind of contextual variability suggests that an exclusive focus on spatial proximity in residential settings is unnecessarily constrained.

Along with accenting (residential) spatial structure, the current literature on mixed-race partnership formation routinely invokes the metaphor of the market. The idea of a market for marriages draws on the highly successful metaphor of the 'invisible hand of the market', which alludes to the unseen mechanisms that aid the allocation of scarce resources according to changing demand and supply conditions (cf. McCloskey, 1998). The market approach foregrounds opportunity structures rooted in economic orthodoxy (e.g., Kennedy, 1943; Peach, 1980; Kalmijn, 1998; Qian and Lichter, 2001). The discussions of status exchange, in particular, feature economic biases as scholars analyze what each partner trades (similar to a cost/benefit analysis) to improve personal status (Merton, 1941; Blackwell and Lichter, 2000; Jacobs and Labov, 2002). Scholars employ the marriage market metaphor when examining the relative availability of suitable partners (typically delineated by sex, age, religion, race, nativity, or a combination of these) at the local (e.g., Ní Bhrolcháin *et al.*, 2002), regional (e.g., Lichter *et al.* 1991; Brien, 1997; Farley, 1999; Bratter and Zuberi, 2001), national (Ní Bhrolcháin, 2001; Qian and Lichter, 2001; Rosenfeld, 2002), and international scales (e.g., Piper, 1997; Adams and Ghose, 2003).⁴ Whether or not we accept the utility of this particular metaphor to leverage insight into mixed-race partnership formation, the emphasis in the research on rational logic comes at the expense of other approaches. In foregrounding everyday contexts, we hope to illustrate different spatialities of mixed-race encounters and thereby help reimagine social processes.

What changes a chance meeting or a routine set of interactions over days, weeks, and months to a friendship and beyond hinges, we know, on unpredictable chemistries. In distancing ourselves from the perspective that certain geographies of mixed-race encounters and interactions are causal, we propose that future scholarship unpack the 'where', and the related 'how' and 'when',

of mixed-race meetings in the everyday. Such an analytical focus will help us understand why and how contexts are simultaneously possible for some and impossible for others. It will also expand and stretch both the structural accounts that pepper the current literature and those that advocate for a straightforward spatial or economic logic of meeting. Part of studying exchanges in everyday contexts includes attending to the unfolding of private affairs in public spaces. This acknowledgement carries several implications. Allegedly everyone can be seen in the public sphere; yet, visibility is differentiated and contested along various axes of identity (race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability, etc.). Moreover, what may be acceptable private behavior for the public sphere for some couples may be described as inappropriate or transgressive for others (see Valentine, 1996). Thrift (2004: 57) makes clear that such assertions are political judgments ‘about which passions are wholesome and which are suspect or even dangerous, about the degree to which passions can or should be allowed untrammelled licence [sic], and about how passions can be amplified or repressed’.

Visibility, and the entire construct of public and private space, is also legally delimited. Mitchell (2005) notes that the recent statutes defining parameters for protestors at abortion clinics – the eight-foot ‘bubble’ rule, meaning that protestors cannot be closer than eight-feet to a client – serve to redefine public and private spaces. In light of these new regulations, Mitchell questions what happens ‘when the private *becomes* the public, when the right to exclude expands from home to commonly accessible space, or when that right exists as a new spatial practice where you can always and everywhere keep those you do not want to encounter out of your own personal zone of privacy? What does it mean when public space comes to be governed by rules formerly reserved for private property?’ (2005: 19, emphasis in the original; see also Kohn, 2004). Mitchell delves into the legal distancing that could occur in public spaces because

of bubbles of private space; by extension, we wonder how such bounding of space might impact meetings and customary interactions and how the law might serve to galvanize or erode racial barriers (cf. Moran, 2001). In other words, we consider the ramifications of legalized mechanisms that keep bodies apart, and we also reflect on the implications of legislation, such as workplace desegregation law, that produces spaces where involuntary interactions become normalized (Estlund, 2003).

Before launching into the bulk of our discussion on specific contexts of meeting, we want to register our preference for the term ‘partnership’ over ‘marriage’; the former expression is broader and includes married couples, people in cohabiting relationships, and same-sex couples (Wright *et al.*, 2003: 461). Yet, despite our attempts at inclusivity, the majority of studies on mixed-race partnering focus on heterosexual couples, and our review shows this bias. We recognize that the spaces of possible meeting for mixed-race gay couples may be quite distinct; further research needs to attend to this variability. As for other terminology, we use mixed race ‘because it centers attention on the process of racialization’ (Wright *et al.*, 2003: 461). This choice goes against the grain of much previous research, evident in that ‘interracial’ is most commonly invoked to describe partnerships that cross racial lines and that ‘mixed race’ increasingly refers to individuals, not partnerships or households. Yet, in our view, as a prefix, ‘inter’ implies betweenness and does not sufficiently acknowledge the power of racial hierarchies. Further, it risks glossing over how individuals are racialized even within mixed-race relationships. In an effort to maintain an overt awareness of racialization, we thus ‘scale up’ mixed race from singular bodies and apply it to relationships.

We use the language of race in our research, rather than ethnicity, because of the potency of skin color. While many people cannot immediately differentiate between

ethnic heritages, race as a hierarchy continues to command a powerful place in social ordering (Omi and Winant, 1994). This is especially true in the USA. Despite our focus on race, some of the research we cite discusses multi-ethnic households and interethnic/pan-ethnic relations. We include this literature because some 'ethnic' groups are racialized and therefore these studies contribute to our understandings of everyday contexts. Including such research also widens our geographical purview as some of the studies draw on situations in national contexts outside of the USA.

II The girl (boy) next door?

The center of gravity in partnership studies often settles on friendships and union formation in residential neighborhoods. Such studies generally start with the postnuptial couple and then look retrospectively to the causes of meeting. Investigations, as a result, tend to apply broad-scale interpretations and often skim over individual narratives or experiences. For example, Peter Blau (1977) and his associates (Blau *et al.*, 1984; Rytina *et al.*, 1988) suggest that structural features of society, such as heterogeneity and inequality, either enable or preclude contact between groups. Their ideas are frequently translated to studies of mixed-race partnering, particularly in the assumption that group size directly affects patterns of relationship formation. Kalmijn (1993), for instance, reports that in some US states with relatively small black populations the likelihood of a black partnering with a white may exceed 50%. In contrast, in states comprised of a large proportion of blacks, the rate of black/white mixed-race marriage may be as low as 1%.

In a similar vein, scholars also point to an inverse relationship between the degree of residential racial segregation and the incidence of mixed-race partnering (e.g., Peach, 1980; Morgan, 1981). Through a case study of marriages between racial and ethnic groups in the first half of the twentieth century in New Haven, Connecticut, Peach (1980) tests the

hypothesis that segregation and marital assimilation are inversely related. He determines considerable support for this hypothesis. Groups with low levels of segregation (e.g., northwest European) had significant levels of intermarriage. Conversely, Italians and Jews maintained relatively high rates of segregation and low rates of outmarriage during the 50 years under study. Notably, blacks were the most segregated group and hardly outmarried. Morgan's (1981) research on homogamy in Christchurch, New Zealand, shows that neighborhood residential patterns significantly shape partner choice. Interestingly, however, Morgan does not discover a relationship between linear distance (measured by place of residence) and social distance. He thus concludes that social networks are better thought of as informed by mosaics of neighborhoods rather than Cartesian distance.

Previous studies have also argued that proximity by residence elevates the chances of contact that lead to long-term partnership and/or marriage (e.g., Bossard, 1932; Kennedy, 1943; Clark, 1952; Coleman and Haskey, 1986; Lieberman and Waters, 1988; Kalmijn and Flap, 2001). Shorter distances, the story claims, raise the ease and frequency of interactions, producing the generality that individuals often marry the boy or 'girl next door'. Coleman and Haskey (1986: 344) argue, for example, that the distance decay function that characterizes the range of geographic distances between partners (both at time of marriage and time of first meeting) 'is always highly skewed, with a relatively high proportion of couples living reasonably close to each other and a rapidly declining proportion living successively further away from each other'. In their study, conducted for the whole of the UK, residential distance offers critical insight into partnership formation patterns and consequently takes center stage. Similarly, Sigelman *et al.* (1996) conclude that the location of neighborhoods in Detroit influences the types and quality of encounters whites have with blacks. Indeed, propinquity

between whites and blacks is key for the quantity of interactions whites have with blacks. For blacks, on the other hand, residential location has less influence, and personal childhood experiences emerge as a significant determinant of the quality and quantity of interactions.

Neighborhood residential patterns shape other potential contexts of meeting as well. Mouw and Entwisle (2003), for instance, use data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health survey to measure the effects of neighborhood residential segregation on school segregation (quantified by the presence of mixed-race friendships). Through this they touch upon the geographical embeddedness of public school systems, which generally draw students from immediate environs. Mouw and Entwisle determine that all groups except Hispanics experienced high degrees of friendship segregation even after the researchers controlled for residential segregation, social class disparities, grade point average differences, and shared membership on a team or in a club. The authors' conclusions lead us to question how the powerful messages (cultural and otherwise) given to children in schools might inform patterns of segregation and integration. The results also illustrate how relying upon friendship networks and the neighborhood scale as a metric for mixing might mean missing other relevant aspects in the geographies of mixed-race meetings.

The fairly passive acceptance of the pre-eminent role of the neighborhood in partnership formation is perhaps most apparent in statistical estimations of neighborhood space. The long history and ease of application of the dissimilarity and exposure indices show that, for many purposes, they provide useful summaries of urban social geographies. Investigations that rely on the dissimilarity or exposure index to portray neighborhood segregation, however, run the risk of misrepresenting interactions on the ground as they privilege one spatial scale over others (e.g., Waldorf, 1993; Schnell and Yoav, 2001; Sin,

2002; Holloway *et al.*, 2005). These statistics assess the probability of people of one group living in the same census tract as members of another group; they therefore direct attention to neighborhood processes at the expense of considering other venues where mixing occurs. '[A] racially mixed area . . . should not be taken as "integration" . . . Whites and blacks may occupy the same block and the ratio between blacks and whites may appear to be even, but the exact location of the residences within the block usually displayed a tendency toward microscale spatial separation' (Hoelscher, 2003: 680). The cloaking of contact and separation within aggregate appraisals shows how statistical representations of residential segregation blur details of daily interaction. The mapping and analysis of residential segregation using the dissimilarity and exposure indices is an undoubtedly important project as statistical portraits highlight 'a group's distribution in space' (Schnell and Yoav, 2001: 622). Yet, this focus often comes at the expense of considering 'an individual's everyday experience of isolation' (Schnell and Yoav, 2001: 622).

Despite the preoccupation in the literature with the neighborhood, studies have shown that this context is declining in relevance as a meeting place. Bozon and Heran (1989), for example, survey how the places in French society where people meet changed between 1914 and 1984. They determined that people met their spouses in a much wider range of venues in 1984 than in 1914. About two-thirds of French marriages in the early twentieth century resulted from initial encounters at a dance, at work, in the neighborhood, or during a private visit. In contrast, in 1984 'these four forms of encounter only accounted for one third of all meetings' (Bozon and Heran, 1989: 93), and couples were more likely to meet in nightclubs, at parties, while studying, in public places, and through clubs or sports. Of particular note, the authors state that the neighborhood had the most significant decrease in importance of all the venues under study. In 1914, the

neighborhood accounted for over 20% of meetings; by 1984, less than 5% of the couples surveyed met in such places, supplanted in large part by encounters associated with leisure activities. Bozon and Heran (1989: 95) mused that this 'reflects an increasingly pronounced reluctance to meet under the scrutinizing stare of the community'.

Kalmijn and Flap (2001) also conclude that the range of contexts of meeting is growing over time and that the neighborhood setting itself is declining in importance. These insights come from a Dutch survey that asked couples if they had ever simultaneously shared a setting. Neighborhoods accounted for 11.5% of the shared settings Kalmijn and Flap considered, and most couples had not shared neighborhoods, schools, workplaces, or associations and had no family connections. Clearly, the range of contexts for partnership formation extends both beyond and within the neighborhood. This might be particularly true for mixed-race couples given the increased societal surveillance and prohibition against such partnerships relative to same-race couples.

New research should both interrogate more deeply what comprises the neighborhood and how this varies by group. Attending to the minutiae of lived experiences within the broadly defined space of the neighborhood will sharpen our understanding of what constitutes residential neighborhoods and will offer avenues to critically engage with mixed-race encounters, collaborations, and friendships. Foregrounding spaces of the everyday in the neighborhood encourages multiscalar and translocal appreciations of the many contexts of mixed-race meetings (cf. de Certeau, 1984). Such a focus also demonstrates that the spaces that foment mixed-race friendships and partnerships cannot *exclusively* exist within the broad neighborhood scale (in all its forms). Instead, we see a significant need to acknowledge, theorize, and study the variety of spaces (including the next three contexts) where mixing occurs.

III 'We can work it out . . .'

Since simply "going to work" actually connotes daily shifts in one's social milieu' (Blumen and Zamir, 2001: 1779), this context warrants further investigation into who works where (discussed in the occupational segregation, journey-to-work, and spatial mismatch literatures) and what microspatialities of encounter unfold *where* people work. In an effort to map workplace geographies by race, Ellis *et al.* (2004) suggest new ways of thinking about changes in social worlds, racial mixing, and the possibilities for new associations that accrue from diurnal swings in social interactions. They do this by shifting the analytical focus from the place of residence to the place of work. In their study, they realize that tracts of employment have lower levels of segregation between groups than tracts of residential location. In Los Angeles, this relationship was particularly striking for native-born whites and Mexican immigrants, people who generally live apart residentially but entertain significant rates of interaction in neighborhoods where they work. Therefore, determining segregation exclusively by residential neighborhood (levels of which remain depressingly high and stable) shifts the focus away from important patterns in other places (such as work settings) and presents a static interpretation of race and space. While the authors highlight the significance of such results, Ellis *et al.* (2004) also note that class differences lurk behind diminishing workplace segregation and likely labor against meaningful connections between people. Nevertheless, these findings hint that decreases in workplace segregation might be a force behind the rising rates of mixed-race partnering.

With subheadings of 'Living apart but working together' and 'Bowling alone but working together', Cynthia Estlund (2003) also makes the case that, although society generally continues to be deeply segregated by residence and recreation, 'the workplace is where working adults are most likely to associate regularly with someone of another race' (2003: 3). Mary Waters (1999: 248) concurs, stating that 'the workplace was the

only site where such interaction among so many different groups of people would take place'. Such prosaic encounters are not without friction, but they do open the door to the chance that mixed-race associations may ensue. While careful to acknowledge that mixed-race bonds (trust, solidarity, and friendship) are by no means ubiquitous at work, connectedness across racial lines at work 'can happen, ... does happen, and because of the nature of work and the comparative diversity of workplaces, it happens more in the workplace than anywhere else' (Estlund, 2003: 83).

Estlund's argument pivots on both a request to engage with an understudied arena and to promote a reorientation in perspective. Instead of focusing on voluntary interpersonal associations, she describes the 'compelled associations' of the workplace and laws that regulate discrimination, such as equal opportunity and affirmative action (EO/AA) statutes, as the foundations of mixed contact. Recent research by Jamie Winders (2005) on low-wage occupations in Nashville, Tennessee, may bear this out. The racial/ethnic composition of the low-wage workforce in Nashville (much like many other US cities) is currently transitioning from a predominantly black female workforce to one that includes native-born white and black workers, Mexicans and other Latin Americans, and political refugees from around the world. Employees rarely acknowledged in interviews (even when prompted) these apparent racial and ethnic changes. This did not stem from worker isolation; Colombians, Mexicans, and African-Americans, for instance, mostly worked next to one another in the laundry department and developed relations that cut across ethnic boundaries. 'In interviews with workers in laundry, it became clear that many relations continued outside the laundry room and the workday's temporal boundaries' (Winders, 2005: 18). Clearly the workplace can provide possible connections across perceived lines of racial difference and separation. Of course, histories of racism and

inequalities perpetuated through innumerable avenues still shape workplaces, but we still see possibilities for mixed-race meetings in employment contexts.

Another example of a workplace where people are compelled to work toward a common goal (irrespective of race) is the current US military. Moskos and Butler (1996) detail how a policy of zero tolerance for racial discrimination and a demonstrated commitment to establishing blacks and other minorities in leadership positions helps produce the most racially egalitarian institution in US society. The current face of the military finds root in the imposed mandate of racial collaboration; yet, no institution is free of prejudice and intolerance. Integration in the military, assisted by recruiting strategies that target a specific social class, however, might help explain why white men in current service are eight times more likely to marry a black woman than white men in civilian life (Heaton and Jacobson, 2000). Although the rates varied by racialized group, the same study also exposed significantly increased odds for mixed-race partnering for female military personnel. In related research, Farley (1999) reports that white women with military service are seven times more likely to marry a black man than white women who have not served (see also Lundquist, 2004).

Mixed encounters occur in other military contexts as well. For example, for over 50 years the USA has had thousands of men and women stationed on large, permanent bases in South Korea and Japan. A large sex industry has developed around these locations, but the mixing in these 'ethnosexual work zones' has not always been casual (Nagel, 2003: 178–79). Indeed, about 100,000 Korean women have immigrated to the USA since the 1950s as married partners of servicemen (Moon, 1997; Yuh, 2002). More generally, partnerships among military men and Asian women account for a large proportion of all white-Asian mixed-race couples (Jacobs and Labov, 2002).

The workplace is not a utopic meeting site. Indeed, we would be remiss if we did not acknowledge the research that explores social bias in workplace settings. As Holzer (1998) uncovers, discriminatory practices in hiring are more pervasive in small businesses than large ones (who have to comply with EO/AA policies). Furthermore, the figurative space available in the workplace to perform particular identities or engage in the process of meeting racial others continues to be differentiated by variables such as location within employment hierarchies, gender and race expectations, education and class status, and occupational sector. Although obligatory interactions at work are by no means free from racial, class, or cultural prejudice, employment settings often draw adults into interpersonal interactions and acts of cooperation that would not otherwise occur.

The lessons we take from all this is that scholarship on race and employment, while maintaining an awareness of structural forces that shape workplaces, should also scale down to individual perspectives and informal settings within workplaces to flesh out social interactions. Workplaces are increasingly diverse settings and this might very well lead to significant interpersonal relationships. In line with the changing demographics of workplaces, scholarship should also be sensitive to the expanding definition of 'the place of employment'. Contemporary workplaces complicate standard expectations and challenge predeterminations about what constitutes an employment context. The workplace now includes everything from the factory to the prison, home, back office, boardroom, phone or DSL line, and military base (Mitchell *et al.*, 2003). Now, more than ever, '[m]eetings at work have a different logic' (Bozon and Heran, 1989: 101) and experiences at work are differentiated along a number of axes because 'the body is inscribed . . . by specific workplace practices' (McDowell, 1997: 13) and stereotypes (e.g., Reitman, 2005b). We can assist in unraveling the complexities of meeting in workplace

contexts by adopting a variety of theoretical perspectives, not the least of which involves thinking about everyday time-space patterns and racialized interpersonal interactions (Reitman, 2005a; 2005b).

IV Experiential education

Scholars often point to similar levels of educational attainment (educational homogamy) within already-formed postnuptial couples as a likely cause of partnership (cf. Schoen and Wooldredge, 1989; Kalmijn, 1991; 1998; Blackwell and Lichter, 2000; Kalmijn and Flap, 2001). Hwang *et al.* (1997), for example, adopt such an approach to study cultural assimilation for six Asian American populations (Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Asian Indian, and Vietnamese). In their analysis of US partnering patterns (interethnic and mixed race) for already-partnered Asian Americans, the authors use 1980 Census data to explore the correlation between outpartnering and socioeconomic status. They reveal that Asians of higher socio-economic standing (measured by educational attainment) are less likely than less-educated Asians to partner out (1997: 766). This result contrasts with the findings of Lieberson and Waters (1988) who make the case that 'ethnic differences in educational attainment do not help us to understand differences in the ethnic groups' levels of intermarriage' (1988: 213). These studies represent the mainstream literature, but we wonder what questions and insights might arise if we scale down; in other words, what might we learn from examining the daily interactions and places of contact in educational settings?

In the United States, most public and private schools, colleges, and universities, like most workplaces, are subject to antidiscrimination law in terms of race and ethnicity. Not surprisingly, scholars repeatedly link post Civil Rights changes in the racial demographics of educational institutions to increases in mixed-race interaction and, for some, partnering (e.g., Heaton and Jacobson, 2000). As Clark-Ibáñez and Felmler (2004) report, college

students' social network diversity correlates positively with the chances of mixed-race romance. Emerson *et al.* (2002: 745) share similar insights, asserting that people 'who had experienced prior interracial contact in schools and neighborhoods were more likely, as adults, to have more racially diverse general social groups and friendship circles. They were more likely . . . to be interracially married.' These people had, in other words, garnered experience negotiating racial politics. Along the same lines, but specific to educational contexts, Qian *et al.* (2001: 561) state that (for Asians at least) a diverse educational setting 'weakens ethnic attachments' because of the rise in interactions with people from other racial and ethnic groups. These authors also claim, in contrast, that colleges and universities can foster pan-ethnic identities because such places encourage 'the collective Asian American experience rather than ethnicity-specific experience' (2001: 564). As the divergent findings suggest, racial identity, much like the possibility of racial mixing, is context-specific.

Although many institutions explicitly draw on clientele from diverse backgrounds to deliberately build a place of residential learning that exists through and because of difference,⁵ this is not a simple endeavor. The 2003 Supreme Court rulings on the role of race in admissions at the University of Michigan⁶ exemplify this point. Furthermore, while university and college campuses have become more diverse over the last few decades, questions of visibility and access still endure. For instance, the architecture of the school, the campus layout, the landscape design, and the racialized histories of its institutions often shape varying diurnal patterns of movement for both groups and individuals. Moreover, many colleges and universities are ripe with voluntary involvement in exclusive living or social spaces that generally preclude people from meeting different students. Conversely, there are involuntary situations where a professor might assign students to collaborate on group

projects and people might begin to confront stereotypes through such endeavors.

Mixed-race interactions are not just relevant to university and college contexts. The growing diversity in US society in general means that secondary schools are also sites for potential mixed-race friendships and relationships. As Joyner and Kao (2000) conclude, disparate patterns of mixed-race friendships emerge for racial groups in secondary schools, the likelihood of friendship with someone of another race increases when the size of the same-race group decreases, and junior and high school racial compositions fail to tell the whole story about friendships. In related work, Tatum (1997) explores the psychology of black student self-segregation in secondary schools. She uses the image of black students sitting together in the cafeteria to mobilize her argument about the difficulties associated with imbalanced majority-minority ratios in schools. She also argues, echoing Estlund, that connections across racial lines are forged through joint participation in common academic or athletic projects. With this said, and as we have already discussed, experiencing the same space (wherever that might be) does not necessarily signify that close relations will result.

While secondary school settings frequently function as spaces to encounter diversity, they can also be manipulated to prevent such interactions or to reinforce differences. Parents who have the means and who want to provide parameters for the kinds of people with whom their children associate can control educational choices. Blackwell (1998: 163–64) argues that such management directly affects both future relationships that cross racial lines and the potentials of such interactions. While she assumes that people are similar along other axes of identity if they belong to the same educational class, she raises an important point about the choices, cultural differences, and power hierarchies that help structure interactions. A clear extension of Blackwell's study is an explicit

questioning of how much race plays into family regulation and how such social practices inform future friendship patterns for children.

Most previous studies of race and education use Census and survey data to track the degrees of interaction between students of different races or to reach a causal conclusion about the role of educational attainment in partnerships. These perspectives form the foundation for current interpretations of the nexus of race and education. We instead call for investigating the possibility for everyday interactions within educational environments. This retraining of the analytical focus could be done through many avenues; for instance, time-diaries (cf. Pred, 1981; Latham, 2003) would help demonstrate if, when, and where mixed-race meetings occur. Extensive interviews with students themselves might also map places of possible encounters. In sum, delving deeper into the everyday geographies of students in a wide range of educational contexts might further our insight into mixed-race partnership formation.

V Going on Safari

Between 1997 and 2000, the proportion of US households with internet access increased from 18 to 41.5% (US Department of Labor, 2000). A similar percentage of the US population connected to the internet at work (US Department of Labor, 2001). Access, of course, varies by gender, race, and socioeconomic class and the digital divide assumes many forms; for countless people, however, internet browsers like Explorer, Firefox, and Safari have become staple features (and spaces) of daily life. Cyberspace's simultaneously nebulous location (just where *is* cyberspace?) and strong presence in the everyday ushers in new sensibilities about the meaning of place and suggests that the world exists just beyond the cursor. The digital realm offers innovative avenues for overcoming traditionally conceived geographic barriers to contact through providing the opportunity to instantly connect with others

around the globe (cf. Adams and Ghose, 2003). The resultant time-space compression 'signal[s] the subsequent upheaval in our experience and representation of space and time that this speed-up brings about' (Thrift, 1995: 21). Social relations have the potential of assuming new forms on the web because of the new landscapes of communication and because, as Wynn and Katz (1997: 302) express, the 'internet provides people with the opportunity to do what they have always wanted, which is to abandon the confines of a limiting self'. Indeed, 'when chatting online, participants are performers performing to an audience of performers – all aware that everyone is performing' (Waskul and Douglass, 1997: 394). Engaging with the daily performativity of the web might shed light on new geographies of racial meetings.

Some of the most obvious effects of cyberspace on mixed-race encounters are online marriage services, 'cruising sites of ethnosexual desire' (Nagel, 2003: 22; cf. Said, 1979: 188) and 'the advertising medium for world sex' (Nagel, 2003: 234). An internet search for potential partners produces hundreds of matrimonial, meeting, dating, and 'international' 'mail-order'⁷ bride websites (typing race terms into a search engine brings up a host of porn sites as well). On sites that advertise partners in the same country, race and ethnicity slip to the background as spatial proximity becomes noticeably more important. Match.com, udate.com, and single-sites.com, for example, highlight the distinctly local flavor available in cyberspace. Such sites typically seek information on age and sex and then ask for a preferred distance from a zip code. Within moments, a list (varying from a handful to hundreds) of local potential partners appears for perusal. Prospects can be sorted by their declared race, occupation, age, or distance. The importance of distance, of course, is that while the web might enable cruising the world, most people prefer *real* partners (of a particular profile) in *real* spatial proximity (cf. Jarvis *et al.*, 2001: 9). While these are predominantly dating services, the

acclaimed 'success' rates for long-term partnership as a result of these online meetings is notable.

Most 'international' websites celebrate the ethnic, regional, or racial distinctiveness of prospects in both the URL address (e.g., Voltagirls.com) and in the people featured (usually women, but see Adams and Ghose, 2003). These sites exude both performativity and power; the women and men advertising in these places publicly rehearse in 'reiterative and citational practice' (Butler, 1993: 2) their racialized sexuality, thus reproducing a set of norms that reinscribes expected sex roles. Mail-order bride sites featuring Asians dominate the international arena, and they collectively play on neocolonial stereotypes of female Asian compliance and sensuality (cf. Said, 1979: 188; Perez, 2003). These sites primarily cater to a largely western, middle-aged, white clientele (Scholes, 1999). Unlike other types of meeting on the web (such as chat rooms), anonymity is not the goal here; on the contrary, people post photos and personal biographies to draw prospects in. As Sonja Luerhmann (2004) describes, whether Russian women using online services:

want to emigrate, find a way to have a family or simply be invited to Italy for a vacation, these women are writing because they want a response, and they are writing to those people (Western men) who are both motivated to respond to them (because they dream of finding a beautiful, feminine Russian woman) and materially and legally able to respond (because they have the necessary funds to sponsor a bride and because their government's laws recognize a right of spouses to live together). (Luerhmann, 2004: 872)

Part of the performance on these pages and these online interactions necessitates burying the dire socio-economic circumstances and absence of choice (Tyner, 1994) that drives women to present themselves in such ways. Race, ethnicity, and femininity catalyze hopes for an alternative future for these women as they use the internet to leverage increased options in their lives. Yet, some internet-derived relationships result in abuse,

conditions comparable to indentured servitude, and forced prostitution (Lee, 1998). Race, nativity, love, and hate all come to bear in partnership formation; no two partnerships are the same (whether or not facilitated by cyberspace).

Kang (2000) puts forth other interpretations of racial possibilities on the web. He suggests that the internet provides concrete ways for challenging the 'racial schemas (categories, mapping, meanings) [that] shape social interactions' (2000: 1153). Specifically, he delineates three types of reconfigurations of race that could occur in cyberspace. He first outlines racial abolition, which could overturn racial mapping through enabling one to 'wear a racial veil' (2000: 1155). Taking cues from whiteness theory, Kang notes, however, that colorblindness and anonymity in general and on the web usually defaults to an assumption of white skin, rather than a truly raceless perception (2000: 1158). Kang also considers the idea of racial integration, predicated upon increased interaction between groups; this potential race reimagination falls short, though, as it relies on accessibility to the internet (2000: 1162). Finally, Kang mentions racial transmutation, 'which disrupts racial categories by promoting racial pseudonymity' (2000: 1153). Ultimately, Kang is dissatisfied with all of these strategies for cyber-race. He concludes that new web architecture, and the related geography of cyberspace, needs to expressly account for multiple presentations of race and racialization so as to move toward different (more inclusive) racial politics (2000: 1186).

Kolko *et al.* (2000) explore similar themes as Kang *et al.* in their edited anthology. Of particular relevance here is their acknowledgement that, while people might cloak racial identities, adopt different ones, or not disclose one at all, race still matters in cyberspace because 'neither the invisibility nor the mutability of online identity make it possible for you to escape your "real world" identity completely' (2000: 4). They continue, 'all of us who spend

time online are already shaped by the ways in which race matters offline, and we can't help but bring our own knowledge, experiences, and values with us when we log on' (2000: 5). Indeed, we carry certain expectations to interactions on the web. Race also matters in the transition to real-time partnerships. Mixed-race couples most likely feel more intensely visible in real time than in cyberspace. Meeting in real time means embodying race and difference and confronting social stigmas and stereotypes. Therefore, the probability of being read by skin color in daily life activities while in a relationship in proximity, in contrast to the possibilities of cloaking race in cyberspace, might bear on patterns of racial meeting and mixing forged on the web.

The tension between both the supposed untrammelled freedom and the reality of constraint in cyberspace is a particularly productive place of inquiry into mixed-race meetings. Moss and Kwan (2004), for example, discuss how the interplay of 'real' bodies and 'real' technologies draws attention to both 'social construction *and* the tangible, concrete expressions of the body and technology *at the same time*' (2004: 383, emphasis in the original). This approach enables the authors to 'produce a feminist reading of space *through* bodies and technologies' (2004: 384, emphasis in the original). Extending Moss and Kwan's agenda we argue that through purposefully considering the possibilities of the web we can glean new perspective on everyday racial mixing. We assert that this is particularly important because contemporary internet research 'suffer[s] from a lack of individual-level data at fine spatial and temporal scales' (Kwan, 2003: 478); an emphasis on the everyday would begin to fill this gap.

Influences of race, gender, sexuality, access, and class come to bear on the web in other ways as well. Kwan (2003), for instance, recognizes that, although there is widespread use of the internet by women and men in developed countries, patterns of internet use can reinscribe traditional gender roles.

Specifically, Kwan claims that women are more likely than men to use the internet for maintaining relationships and for commercial enterprises, traditionally feminine activities; 'the internet is rampant with commercial websites that target and construct women largely as consumers and online shoppers . . . As women's other identities (such as activist or intellectual) are often ignored, the commercial orientation of the internet will tend to shape the way women use it in most cases' (Kwan, 2003: 372). Kwan reminds us that aspects of the digital divide (originally defined in terms of access) might be overcome; the way that cyberspace is occupied, by individuals and groups, however, suggests that its use is far from equitable and far from race neutral. This certainly informs potential patterns of meeting in cyberspace.

Even though Ellegard and Vilhelmson (2004: 282) posit that the ubiquity of online communication might contribute to the 'death of geography', we can envision several productive and potential lines of future geographic inquiry in cyberspace. How people navigate concepts of distance and establish virtual proximity, where in cyberspace people tend to meet, where people who meet in cyberspace actually live, what social cues gain relevance and power on the web (cf. Whitty and Gavin, 2001), where people tend to 'go' when surfing cyberspace, what prompts couples to shift from online to offline relations, how internet use influences communities and social relations more broadly, and how race is experienced and performed on the web signify but a small sampling of the possibilities attendant with going on Safari.

VI 'I just wanna say, can we all get along?'⁸

Romantic relationships (mixed-race or otherwise) frequently inspire the question 'how did you two meet?' Implicit in such a line of inquiry is a curiosity about *where* couples meet. The responses given to such questions often expose this spatial subtext – for instance, 'we exercise at the same gym', 'we

met at work', 'we attend the same temple', or 'we met in a bar'. Although a common conversation piece, academic research tends to overlook the geographic foundations of long-term partnership formation. Clearly, though, love happens in place. Given this reality we think that it is both important and instructive to pay greater attention to where people encounter each other. We add to this geographic orientation a sensitivity to race, especially since, as Rachel Moran observes, 'race continues to matter in affairs of the heart' (2001: 124). In a society segregated along racial lines, and one in which racism is naturalized in all kinds of ways, the places where racial others meet really matters. Since '[t]he pattern of meetings has changed because the meeting-places themselves have changed and, even more, because the social environment of the two interested parties has changed' (Bozon and Heran, 1989: 96), we have considered a suite of locations where the paths of individuals from 'differently racialized parentage' (Ifekwunigwe, 2001: 46) might cross. There is theoretical and methodological interest in such a project. Clearly there is room for deeper investigations into neighborhoods, workplaces, educational settings, and cyberspace, as well as into other contexts (e.g., places of leisure [parks, museums, travel, communal gardens, etc.], places of worship, volunteer organizations, and family and friend networks), and we hope that this review marks the beginning of such explorations.

Our emphasis on daily encounters strives to fill perceived gaps in the literature and extends from a desire to write against a noted (and troubling) tendency in current scholarship of relying upon causal and broad scale – distanced – interpretations of racial mixing. In his paper, 'Ironies of distance', Michael Brown (1995) critiques medical geography's detached renderings of the spread of HIV, distanced from gay men and their social spaces. 'Even where specific locations are discussed, the orientation . . . is Archimedean . . . Furthermore, it is difficult to understand the point of such cartographies. Unlike cholera or

smallpox, HIV is not spread through casual contact and transmission modes do not always hinge on residential proximity . . . Would it not make more sense to map people's sexual contacts across space?' (1995: 168). Some of the critique that Brown levels at medical geography could be redirected toward scholarship on mixed-race partnering. By scaling down to the microgeographies of the everyday and by acknowledging a variety of local places of encounter, the possibilities of cross-race sociability and interaction, and thus the possible origins of mixed-race partnership formation, come to the fore.

This is not an effort to fix processes that are inherently uneven and mutable. On the contrary, through examining points of rupture in racial hierarchies we hope to gain insight both into where mixed-race partnerships flourish and, by association, where powerful narratives of race gain new meaning. Put differently, the everyday geographies of racial mixing, the 'micro-geographies of habitual practices' (Nash, 2000: 656), broaden the project of understanding and theorizing racial mixing in everyday spaces (e.g., Delaney, 2002; Hoelscher, 2003; Mitchell *et al.*, 2003). Focusing on the everyday also enables us to propose multiscalar and processual interpretations of racial meeting, mixing, and partnering. In sum, by starting to outline an agenda for research that examines racial mixing at the moment of meeting we expand the purview of (mixed-race) partnership research, animate perceptions of contexts, and join in conversations about race that are occurring in other sectors of society (cf. *New York Times* Correspondents, 2001). Importantly, we also move the literature away from distanced portrayals toward 'the ongoing creation of effects through encounters' (Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000: 415).

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Notes

1. We bring into play literature associated with both United States and non-US locations. We gravitate toward North American contexts (apparent in reflections on Affirmative Action policies, for instance) because of the essay's association with a larger project on mixed-race household geographies in the United States.
2. See Oldenburg (1989) for his explication on the 'third places' beyond home and work or Shinyew *et al.* (2004) for their analysis of a leisure setting – community gardens – as a place of mixed-race interaction and possibility. Churches are also a prominent site for mixed contact and the potential for all kinds of relationships.
3. The addition of a new race category and multiracial reporting on the 2000 Census complicates comparisons across censuses. This calculation by the authors uses conservative estimations.
4. The metaphor even shines through in popular culture, as Rachel Greenwald's (2003) *Find a husband after 35 using what I learned at Harvard Business School: a simple 15 step action program* illustrates.
5. We acknowledge that other institutions of higher education, such as community colleges, often create different opportunities for meeting and attract diverse sets of students. Greater attention to these nuances is needed.
6. *Gratz et al. v. Bollinger et al.*, S. Ct. 516 (2003); *Grutter v. Bollinger et al.*, S. Ct. 241 (2003).
7. Specific sites refer to themselves in a variety of ways, often describing their function as a 'dating' or an 'international pen pal' service.
8. Rodney King made this public appeal soon after the start of the 1992 LA riots following a

jury decision that found four police officers not guilty of assaulting him.

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